

State of the City November 16, 2012 Mayor Tommy Battle

Huntsville: A Smart City on the Move

Good afternoon! I am honored by the trust you have shown in allowing me to serve you as your mayor. I am humbled by the confidence you have placed in me, and I remain excited about the future we are creating for Huntsville.

Looking across this room, I see what makes our city the best in the nation. Your presence here today—your commitment to our community, your innovation and your compassion; thank you for taking time to be here today, and thank you to the Huntsville/Madison County Chamber of Commerce for hosting us.

All that we accomplish is a team effort. That team effort starts at home. Would you please join me in acknowledging my wife, Eula. Eula, thank you for standing with me.

This is the fifth time I have stood before you to report on our state of the city. Today, I am proud to tell you that Huntsville is fiscally stable. We are growing, and we are safe, with an affordable quality of life few cities can match.

This is an impressive statement given our share of challenges over the past four years. Like every other city, we have not been spared by the global economic recession.

And while Huntsville has fared better than most places, we know there are people and businesses in this community that are struggling. No one in this room is forgetting that fact. We are focused on the work we need to do to ensure that everyone has the opportunity to build a better life. Everyone should share in the success of Huntsville.

Our goal has been to emerge from this recession as a vibrant city on the move; a world-class, smart city that will attract young professionals, families, businesses and visitors. There will always be disappointments and challenges, but Huntsville's ability to focus on the possibilities is what sets us apart. This city has never let itself be defined by tragedy-we define Huntsville by accomplishment and achievement.

Huntsville embodies an intellectual spirit, and we embrace an international community. Some of you were born here, we call you lucky; others of us were drawn here and

decided to stay, we say we are smart. The one common thread we all share is a unique drive to challenge ourselves to be better than we are today—to look for the possibilities.

Over a century ago, a wise man said, "I can't understand why people are afraid of new ideas. I am afraid of the old ones." (composer John Cage)

That describes Huntsville. Our quest to be smarter, to be more innovative, is evident throughout our city. Forbes named us as one of the "Top Ten Smartest Cities in the World." We have also been named one of the "Top Five Geekiest Cities in the U.S.!)

This community has an enviable ability to work toward a common goal – whether it is to reach for the stars, secure a BRAC transfer, or pull together resources to build a major roadway. We share a willingness to put aside differences for the greater good. That is what makes our city so great.

A Smart City is TEAM ORIENTED

In my first term as Mayor, I have been privileged to work with leaders like former Madison County Commission Chair Mike Gillespie and former Madison Mayor Paul Finley. These men helped set the standard for teamwork. Mike Gillespie served this community for 32 years. His word is his bond. He always worked for the greater good. He is a man who those of us in public life would like to emulate.

Today, we summon this work ethic to a new group of leaders, here on stage with me today: Madison County Commission Chair Dale Strong and Madison Mayor Troy Trulock. I look forward to working collaboratively with you both.

I'd also like to recognize the members of our Huntsville City Council. Throughout my first term, they have continued to focus on the greater good, and they have been willing to embrace the changes we needed to move our City forward. We will continue to stand with you and work side by side. The team of Showers, Russell, Kling, Culver and Olshefski been part of the team that has made every Huntsville accomplishment become a reality. Please give this part of the team a round of applause.

A Smart City is EFFICIENT

I am extremely proud of what our team has accomplished in the past year. In City Hall, our budget is lean but balanced – revenue equals expenditures – unusual for governments. We are providing quality services at the lowest possible cost. Our bond rating is triple A, and that is better than both the state and federal governments.

Since I first took office, we have been asking city employees to do more with less. They have helped us identify inefficiencies and opportunities for improvement.

Thanks to these employees' efforts, Huntsville is able to provide quality services while saving millions of dollars annually. We have used those savings to pave more roads,

purchase badly needed fleet, and build infrastructure.

For example, in traffic engineering, workers recycle every sign, pole and cabinet as we replace or upgrade to new modern equipment. Employees are now cross-trained for greater flexibility in assignments and to improve productivity.

Human Resources significantly reduce the cost of employee health care through a proactive wellness program. This includes a tobacco cessation initiative and access to physicians at the City Clinic several days a week.

Positions for many retirees have gone unfilled, and departments have been assuming their duties with current staff.

I am extremely proud of our city employees and their willingness to help.

But government can't simply focus on doing more with less—we must look at how we can be even better.

VIDEO with DEPARTMENT HEADS

Marie Bostick – We traveled to Greenville to look at how it is attracting so many young professionals to the workforce. If we are to compete with the Austin's, Greenville's and Charlotte's, we need a vibrant downtown core.

Michelle Jordan — We have just received our new economic development corridor study to help us improve and identify areas like this one on North Memorial Parkway for redevelopment.

Richard Kramer – We are installing a high tech traffic signal system along Governor's Drive that will adjust signal timings based on real time traffic demand, inclement weather and accidents.

Tommy Brown – We just implemented new route changes that were recommended by a transit operating study that will reduce trip times and improve on time service without increasing the budget. These improvements will increase ridership and make transit service more efficient and effective for the citizens of Huntsville.

Ken Benion – Our code enforcement officers are developing apps for their ipads to increase efficiencies in the field.

Randy Taylor – We want to laser focus on customer service – so you can now pay your sales taxes online.

LaKiska Jimmar – we are exploring a new 311 citizens connect system – an initiative that will provide easy, online access to city services right from your office, your living room or wherever you are with your smart device.

Byron Thomas – We need to be focused on developing the next generation of talent. We have started a new leadership academy to identify those emerging leaders and to mentor them for upper level management roles.

Karen Sheppard – Our volunteer program manages our highly success social media pages, and they help transport pets to a shelter in Long Island, New York for adoption. This program does more than save lives of these pets--it also saves taxpayer dollars, creates friendships, advocates and promotes our department's professionalism and devotion, and builds hope in our animal welfare community that 'together we can make a difference.'

Terry Hatfield – We are using a new product -- reclamite -- to surface roads. We are the first in the state to use the product and it adds 5 to 7 years to the lifespan of a road, saving our taxpayers money.

Lewis Morris – we have a new e-citation system that our police officers are using in their patrol cars.

Mike Sublett – we have introduced new online training courses for our firefighters so they can remain at their stations while learning and still be ready to go in an emergency.

Shane Davis – Our new urban planner will be on board next month and will help lead us through a master planning process for the entire city.

As promised, our urban development department is streamlining the permitting process and moving it online – that program is in testing right now and will be available in January.

A Smart City is INNOVATIVE

These are just a few of the innovations we are working on in City Hall. At this time, I would like to ask our department heads and our administrative team to please stand. Please join me in giving a round of applause to this outstanding team and to all of our city employees.

A Smart City is ENGAGES PARTNERS

Government can't do it all, government can't afford it all, and a smart city knows it's about partnerships. We accomplish more when we work together.

With determination and collaboration, and with your help, we're going to deliver a better, smarter Huntsville. We need to look toward innovation and creative partnerships to build a brighter tomorrow.

For example, our jobs initiatives now include partnerships through GEO Huntsville, Cyber Huntsville, and Energy Huntsville. These groups are run by hundreds of volunteers who are working to create dynamic synergies to help grow and diversify our workforce in new technologies. The Chamber of Commerce is on board, and we are excited about the possibilities emerging from these technology leaders.

Just last week GeoHuntsville held a two-day symposium that highlighted the technology and expertise found in Research Park and through-out Huntsville/Madison area. It is impressive.

In a partnership effort for an urban development, the City's investment in a parking garage for Councill Courts will support a \$90 million mixed-use development. This downtown revitalization project will soon have a new hotel, grocery store, apartments, offices and retail.

The Belk-Hudson project was also a public-private partnership. The 89-unit loft apartments are complete, and residents are moving in each day, providing more feet on the street and a different lifestyle option in our urban core.

Redstone Gateway is a billion dollar collaboration between the Arsenal, the City of Huntsville and private developers. The first building is finished, and will soon be occupied. Two additional buildings have been leased. The Gateway retail corridor is starting to take shape. The future is bright.

Cummings Research Park, our crown jewel, just celebrated its 50th anniversary. It is the second largest Research Park in America and one of the City of Huntsville's most successful public-private partnerships. This past year, Hudson-Alpha completed its 88,000, square foot expansion; Dynetics has constructed a 253,000 square foot addition; and Wyle-CAS just broke ground on a 120,000 square foot new building. Bridge Street is slated to expand in the next year. Cummings Research Park continues to be a vital part of Huntsville's economic engine.

Our partners in education are using innovative agreements to bolster academic performance by partnering with Athens State College and Teach for America. The visionary one-to-one laptop program is also supported through dozens of community partnerships to ensure that students have Wi-Fi access after school.

Huntsville also teamed up with our City Schools and Alabama A & M University to add artificial turf to the Lewis Crews Stadium. Now, our high school teams will have the opportunity to play weekend ball games in a college stadium.

Our growing network of neighborhood associations is one of the most important and vibrant partnerships between the City of Huntsville and citizens. This grass roots program allows us to directly interact with volunteer civic leaders, so we can hear their needs and work collaboratively on solutions.

Public Safety officers are pioneering a new \$3 million interoperability radio system partnership with the 911 center and other law enforcement, allowing the highest inter agency cooperation and seamless communication throughout Huntsville and Madison County.

Huntsville's move toward fuel-efficient vehicles and the potential use of electric cars in our fleet prompted Woody Anderson Ford to loan us an electric car. The power to operate that vehicle equals 110 miles per gallon.

To reduce our waste stream, the City's Solid Waste Authority burns trash. The Solid Waste authority teams with the City of Huntsville to take ten tons of garbage turn the energy in that garbage to steam with the byproduct of three tons of ash. Future possible partnerships with Redstone Arsenal and the City of Huntsville involve the cogeneration of electricity to provide a secure source of power for Redstone Arsenal. Huntsville may be the second city in the country utilizing this new technology.

Keeping our 18 minute daily commute requires multiple partnerships. This year, we were proud to open the North Memorial Parkway overpass, to complete Governor's Drive and Meridian Street, and to start work on Zeirdt Road, Old Madison Pike and County Line Road. These roads are made possible through our Metropolitan Planning Organization partners, Madison County, and the City of Madison. A streetscape project downtown on Washington Street is being made possible in large part to partnerships through state and federal grants.

A smart city is physically fit, and we completed our first year of the Healthy Huntsville Initiative in partnership with Hudson Alpha, Huntsville Hospital, Star Supermarket, and many others.

The Burritt Museum, Veterans Park, Von Braun Center, and Botanical Gardens have all completed new facilities this past year through creative partnerships with the City and private donors.

The Optimist and Kiwanis clubs spearheaded efforts to help make \$2 million in improvements to Brahan Spring Park – the new Miracle League Field, and a special needs playground and splash park. KaBOOM funds are helping us add new playgrounds in Lakewood Park and at the Sparkman Homes Boys and Girls Club.

Traveller is donating services for free Wifi in many of our recreational parks and community centers.

When the caring citizens of this community set out to make a difference, they accomplish amazing things. That's our Huntsville spirit at work.

And, we have big dreams of possibilities and partnerships with our recent announcement to recreate John Hunt Park.

VIDEO of JOHN HUNT PARK

I'm Mayor Tommy Battle, and I welcome you to John Hunt Park, in the centermost part of our City.

What you see here today may not look like much of a park -- with these old airport runways still here from the 60s, and we think it's time to change that.

I am excited to announce that our planning teams in City Hall have designed a new master plan for John Hunt Park, and we think it is filled with possibilities.

First, we propose to tear up the old runways and put in hike and bike trails throughout the Park.

Along the trails, we envision lots of trees, picnic tables, and benches.

A new children's playground and splash park would be added, but Kids Space and Joe Davis Stadium would remain.

The tennis complex would be expanded to accommodate state tournaments, and one day, a 4,000 seat indoor arena could be built for the growing needs of gymnastics, wrestling, cheerleading, and the like.

The popular IcePlex could use a third sheet of ice with stadium seating for hockey games.

And, imagine an outdoor amphitheater sitting behind a man-made lake, along with a 15-acre festival site with a beautiful facility for events.

To accommodate the many soccer and lacrosse teams that currently play in these open fields, we propose to build a new soccer complex about three/quarters of a mile from here at the old McDonnell Elementary School.

Along with Merrimack's Fields, and the four championship fields here at John Hunt Park, this would dramatically expand the number of soccer and lacrosse playing fields in the City.

How we will pay for all of this?

It will take time, but to start the project, we plan to sell surplus property at the corner of Airport Road and Memorial Parkway, and use the revenues for John Hunt Park.

In recent years, this commercial area has been used by police and fire departments, and it could be valuable as an upscale retail development.

We would dedicate 25 % of the sales taxes generated by the retailers to the Parks and Recreation budget so we could continue developing John Hunt Park.

By trading assets for assets, we can finally have a central park for all of Huntsville—a retreat from urban life, and a place where arts can mix with parks, grandparents can stroll, and children can hit balls, tournaments can draw teams, and runners can find peace.

What do you think about our ideas? We invite you to join the conversation as we work together to make Huntsville even better.

BACK TO MAYOR BATTLE

We have developed a web page at www.imaginehuntsville.com for everyone to weigh in on the park plan. I encourage you to let us know your thoughts and ideas.

For those of you who were here with us for last year's State of the City, you may recall that the John Hunt Park plan was a "what if?" One of the many possibilities we are considering for Huntsville's future.

Possibilities and budget realities meet at City Hall on a daily basis. The question with every project is "Do we have all of the money to complete this plan today?" The answer is "no," but with our community partners, with your help, we believe it can be done and we move forward.

So, what's next?

Huntsville is changing. Rule one is "be ready for change; it is the only constant in life". This change in technology and innovation has put Huntsville on the global map. If we want to remain there, we must use the collective intelligence in our community to keep growing, transforming, and creating.

This spring, I was privileged to share the stage in the nation's capitol with the mayors of Washington D.C., and Cincinnati to talk about how Huntsville is innovating energy technologies with the best and brightest.

On the national "Who's Who" scene The Huntsville Museum of Art hosted a highly successful fundraiser in New York with Gloria Vanderbilt, thanks to the vision of its director Christopher Madkour.

NASA has a new mission at the Marshall Space Flight Center to create a solid launch rocket system that will take us further into outer space than we have ever been before, and we are attracting new commercial space ventures such as Stratolaunch Systems that have chosen to headquarter here in Huntsville.

Redstone Arsenal is known as a research and development campus, and billions of dollars in lucrative contracts flow through this installation each year.

The city issued an additional 21-hundred business licenses in 2012. Kiplinger's named us as a top city for mid-career professionals; Milken Institute named us one of the top 10 best performing cities in the county; and *Atlantic Cities* Richard Florida named Huntsville as one of the top cities among America's leading creative class metros.

With all this national attention we need to seize this opportunity to attract the best and the brightest to draw those young professionals to move here and make Huntsville their home. Those "best and brightest" young minds will be the technology leaders of tomorrow. We are competing with Austin, D.C., Boston, and Spokane for that future workforce, and we need to provide these workers with a level of living they expect. That's why we encourage urban lofts, that's why we build disc golf facilities, that's one of the reasons bike trails and greenways are important, and that's why we work on entertainment districts.

We will be keeping all of Huntsville in mind as we continue our focus on master planning, economic and workforce development, high-quality education, public safety, a green environment, and our umbrella of quality of life amenities through our arts, culture, parks and recreation.

We are building a strong foundation on which to deliver our future success. We are in the enviable position of being able to pick and choose our future. We can afford to be selective in our industrial recruitment. We work daily to recruit industry that fit into our core economic fabric. We want companies and partners like Toyota, now is in the third phase of expansion; like Verizon, who just celebrated their fifth anniversary here; and Raytheon, who will build rockets on Redstone Arsenal.

For Huntsville to excel, to continue our focus on job creation and workforce development, it will take all of us working together. Our workforce pulls from Scottsboro, Guntersville, Arab, and Fayetteville, Decatur, Athens, Elkmont, Hartselle, Cullman and even Florence.

When we look at the future, we must think and act globally and regionally. We have seen what can happen on the federal level when leaders don't work together and little is accomplished. The citizens – our communities – are the ones that lose.

That is why I pledge to continue working in collaboration with our regional, state, and national leaders. Huntsville deserves strong, unified leadership, and a city government that will work to establish partnerships with a real desire to find creative solutions to our long-term challenges.

The expansion of our western core is essential to the economic prosperity of our region. We will move forward with purpose and in partnership with our surrounding neighbors.

Huntsville, the State of your City is good. We want to dream big, and everybody needs to be a part of the process, to be a partner in Huntsville's success. Whether you are a

corporate partner, private citizen, or government entity, everybody needs to have ownership in our future.

We want to deliver more opportunity for our children, better jobs, stronger neighborhoods, greener landscapes, excellent schools, and a vibrant community.

We can take a smart city and make it a world-class city—a place where everyone is valued. I hope you will join me in shaping our future. Thank you.

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